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made surrender very difficult. On February 27, terrified by the prospect of a struggle in which Russia would have to choose between humiliating neutrality and military defeat, Iswolsky advised Serbia to inform the Powers that she withdrew her territorial claims. Serbia, however, was in no yielding mood, and Austria was generally expected to issue an ultimatum.

Iswolsky was in a fever of anxiety, not only in regard to the outbreak of war, but owing to Aehrenthal's threat to reveal the negotiations of the previous summer. He implored Billow to avert the exposure, though he still declined formal recognition of the annexation.

At this moment, in the middle of March, 1909, Germany came forward at the wish of her ally and cut the knot. If Iswolsky had to yield, it was slightly less painful for him to surrender to Berlin than to his hated rival at Vienna, for he had never been and never became a Germanophobe. When the first attempt at mediation by the Wilhelmstrasse produced an evasive reply, a thundering telegram brought the dragging dispute to a head. "Tell Iswolsky," ran the instructions to the German Ambassador at St. Petersburg, "that we are ready to propose to Austria to invite the Powers to accept the abrogation of Article 25 of the Treaty of Berlin. Before, however, we approach Austria we must know definitely that Russia will unconditionally accept. You will inform him that we expect a precise answer—yes or no. We should regard an evasive, conditional or ambiguous reply as a refusal. We should then withdraw and let things take their course. The responsibility for further events would be his alone, after we had made a final sincere attempt to be helpful to him and to dear up the situation in a way he could accept."

This historic communication was approved and signed by

Billow, but it was drafted by Kiderlen. The Chancellor had climbed down at Algeciras, and it was Kiderlen's belief that his courage would have failed again in 1909. In principle he was ready to act, but in such a delicate matter, involving the issues of peace and war, the phraseology is of the essence of the matter. To do Austria a good turn without deeply wounding Russia was like trying to square the circle. Never before or after did Kiderlen take so much trouble over the wording of a document. His object was to produce an immediate surrender while avoiding the harshness of an obviously unacceptable ultimatum. The despatch should be read as a whole, for the celebrated Yes or No passage, taken alone, conveys a